



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Winnipeg, MB

Day 2

April 14, 2023

EVIDENCE

Witness 7: Sara Martens

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[00:00:00]

Kyle Morgan

The next witness is Sara Martens. She's just making her way through the room. Good day Mrs. Martens, can you state your whole name?

Sara Martens

Sara Martens.

Kyle Morgan

And can you spell your first and last names for the Commission?

Sara Martens

S-A-R-A M-A-R-T-E-N-S

Kyle Morgan

And do you promise to tell the whole truth, so help you God, nothing but the truth?

Sara Martens

I do.

Kyle Morgan

I understand you're from Manitoba, southern Manitoba?

Sara Martens

Yes, Mitchell and Steinbach.

Kyle Morgan

And for your whole life, you've resided in that area?

Sara Martens

Yes, pretty much.

Kyle Morgan

Can you tell us what profession you have, what type of work you do?

Sara Martens

I've worked with Southern Health for 39 years. I'm not a nurse. I am a health care aide. In the last 10-12 years, I've worked only in a clinic, which is a treatment clinic in Steinbach, also under the home care. We treat people with IVs, injections, a lot of wound care, and that kind of stuff.

Kyle Morgan

I understand that an unfortunate accident happened involving your husband.

Sara Martens

Yes.

Kyle Morgan

It would have been I believe October 20th, 2021?

Sara Martens

[Affirmative nodding]

Kyle Morgan

I don't want to skip ahead too much, ultimately his death was ruled to be a COVID death?

Sara Martens

[Affirmative nodding]

Kyle Morgan

Why don't you tell us what happened on October 20th, 2021?

Sara Martens

So October 20th, 4.30 in the morning, he got up to get ready for his job. He had retired from his previous job that he did forever, and this was a casual job. And what it was, is he would drive a half-ton truck with a closed-in trailer, delivering tires all over Manitoba. So that is what he was getting ready for that morning. I woke up and we chatted for about 10-15 minutes, and then he was off to work. Do I just continue?

Kyle Morgan

Sure, yes.

Sara Martens

So then around 8 o'clock, I got a call from an RCMP that he had been in an accident close to the Austin area, Manitoba. And they just told me that— They asked me a bunch of questions about him. Had he been drinking that morning? Some different questions, I answered them.

And then EMS called me shortly thereafter and told me what had happened. And what appeared to have happened is, he was driving and he must have had a blackout. And he just left the main highway into the ditch over another road and back into a ditch. They had had about three to four inches of rain. And I guess he got stuck in that ditch.

And so when they got to him, the truck was still in drive. The accelerator was pressed all the way down. There was a lot of mud and water flying. And he was just sitting at his wheel, holding on. One of the guys had gone to the window, knocked on the window; he had looked at him. I guess it didn't register. He looked straight ahead. Glasses were hanging on his face. His hat was all crooked and he couldn't respond.

And apparently, according to the EMS, he didn't seem to know who he was, where he was going, what he was doing. And so I'm not sure how long they worked with him. But somewhere towards the end, I think he had managed to say his name. And that was it. The EMS informed me, he said, "You probably should just get ready and go to the hospital." But then he said, "No, actually, you can't go there." So he just changed his mind on that because they wouldn't let me in.

Kyle Morgan

Which hospital was that?

Sara Martens

The Health Sciences Centre.

Kyle Morgan

Here in Winnipeg? Okay.

[00:05:00]

Sara Martens

Right. So I kind of sat at home on my couch, and I feel like I was there for two weeks and two days, always sitting by the phone, always waiting what the next call would be, what the next report would be. They had done scans and tests. And what they told me when I called there after a couple of hours was that he had spinal injuries. He had brain bleeds. I believe there was two. He had bruising. He also had a bleed in the abdomen. I think probably that was about it.

Very confused. And I want to say he was confused. They told me that so many times, “He’s so confused, he’s so confused.” And so I did then ask to speak to him, which I did, on Wednesday, the day he had the accident. And I found him to actually be pretty coherent. He said to me, “Did you hear I was in an accident?” And I said, “I did.”

He was very concerned that someone else had been hurt. And I said, “No, it was just the truck, just you. It’s okay.” I said, “How are you doing?” He said, “I’m good. I’m good.” And I think he probably had a lot of drugs in him. I’m sure his body was really hurting. But he was very upbeat. We chatted for a while, and Cork is not a phone talker, and I know that.

Kyle Morgan

Just to interrupt you, who’s Cork?

Sara Martens

Cork is my husband, that is his nickname. He’s had it forever.

Kyle Morgan

Okay.

Sara Martens

Anyway, and I know he doesn’t like phone talking, so I thought, I’m not going to bore him; I’m not going to keep him on the phone and blah, blah, blah. And so I just wished him well. I actually prayed with him. Just telling him the things that I did. “We love you. We’re here for you.” Sorry.

Kyle Morgan

Now I know that a couple days later on Friday, you spoke to him again. Is that right?

Sara Martens

Yeah.

Kyle Morgan

The accident happened on a Wednesday, and on Friday you did speak to him.

Sara Martens

Right. I did. The days in between, like from Wednesday night to Friday, he was on some oxygen, doing good, pretty stable. There was nothing very eventful.

They did tell me, though, either Wednesday night or Thursday, they called me to tell me that he had tested positive for COVID. And I’m like, “Really?” And after that, there was two different nurses that actually said to me, “He tested positive for COVID, but he wouldn’t even have known it. It was so mild.” So, you know, you go with what they tell you; there’s not a whole lot you could do.

We were not allowed to go there, not ever. We were told he was in ER till Saturday. He had to have a room before we could come. But I feel that they misled us. My children say, “No, they lied.” They’re a little bit more direct than I am. But they really wanted his story out. So I say, thank you for this opportunity.

During this time, they were telling me that a cardiologist was coming in to see him. They’re going to fit him for a back brace. There was a few things that they were going to do. And so each time I asked, “Has the cardiologist been there? Has the back brace been measured?” “No, no.”

And then, finally, one day, the nurse just said, “We’re not doing anything because he has COVID.” And they did not one more thing for him, other than give him whatever medication they pumped him full of.

On Friday, I called him. And it was probably noonish. And I talked to him, and he was confused, very confused. He said to me, “Sara, do you know my neighbour?” We have a neighbour lady. Her name is Jan. “She brought me bales for the cattle.” And we had a little conversation. I said, “Wow, that’s nice of her.” And he said, “Yeah, she’s so good.” And I said, “You’re still working and you’re in the hospital?” He said, “Oh, yeah.” He said, “I’m good.”

So there was a lot of confusion there. Because that wasn’t true. We didn’t have cattle. We did years ago. But none of that was true.

[00:10:00]

So then the funny thing at the end of that conversation, was kind of cute, kind of funny, confusing. I said to him, “Goodbye. I love you.” And he said, “Oh, thank you.” And then, that was it. And that was strange. And I found it a little bit humorous.

But, you know, you’re in a state of such an emotional place. There’s a lot of stress. There’s a lot of unknown. We couldn’t be there. We never could see him. We never could touch him. We could do nothing. We had to trust that what they were doing was the best.

Kyle Morgan

Were you able to speak to a treating doctor? At all?

Sara Martens

And that was the other thing. Every day I asked to speak to a doctor and every day I was promised and every day it didn’t happen. On Saturday morning, and twice, two different nurses said, “Well, what do you know?” And I said, “Well, I know what you tell me.”

So on Saturday morning, I got a male nurse, and I asked him how the— I did the same, I called every morning, every evening and sometimes there’s things in between. So Saturday when I called, this male nurse said, “Well, what do you know?” And I said, “I just know what I know, what you tell me.” I was thinking, they’re hiding something from me. And I said, “You know, I’ve asked to speak to a doctor, I’ve been promised, and I haven’t yet heard from a doctor.”

So he said to me, “I promise you, I will have a doctor call you.” And he did. It didn’t take too long, and the doctor called me. He was rude. He was hard. And he told me that they had intubated him last night, the night before, and I felt so deflated. I’m like, what? How? And

why? I spoke to him on Friday. I never heard a wheeziness, a hoarseness, a coughing. I never heard a thing.

And I do work in a clinic where we do see these kinds of things. We have PPE protection, things that we wear when these kind of people come in. And I know kind of, what the obvious you would hear. For them to intubate him so quickly. And I said, "Well, could there have been other contributing factors?" Like, he had a kidney stone problem. He had a stent put in to bypass the stone that was lodged so that he can go to the bathroom. And actually, that Friday they were going to blast the stone and he's had it done a number of times. He had an infection. "No." And I said, "Could any of that have been a part of the blackout?" Because that was my question: Why did he black out?

And that doctor, and that's why I say he's rude, and he was hard and cold. He just says, "No, that was COVID blackout. That's what that was." And so, none of these other things were factors. They were not even considered.

Kyle Morgan

To interrupt you, you're talking about when the accident happened in the car. The doctor was saying that's a COVID blackout, that's what caused the accident?

Sara Martens

Yes, the reason he had the accident was a COVID blackout. And all these other things were irrelevant. I will just say, in all the medical records, that never came up. It was an unknown reason for the blackout. So first, it's one way and then it's another. He said, "I spoke to Cork last night. I explained to him what it would be to be intubated. It would make his breathing easier and so on. And he consented."

How do you ask a confused person to give a consent? And it was definitely not an emergency intubation because he had all this time to sit and talk to him. He could have called me. He had time to call me. And so it was such an incredible shock when I found out that they had intubated him. And you know the sad thing about that is? I'll just back that up for a minute. The doctor assured me "There are no flags here. There are no concerns. He will be on the ventilator three days, maybe five, no concerns."

Well, he never did wake up from that ventilator.

[00:15:00]

He never did, ever. But you know what's so sad and the thing that I have to deal with and my children is— Why did you not let us have a conversation? Why did you decide that you were doing that? And it took away from all of us, any of us, to talk to him one more time. And I believe doctors know how many people actually survive the ventilator.

And you know, honestly, things just went from that point. It just was a big, fast slide. And then he had a hole blown in his lung from the ventilator, and then he had blood clots and they were deliberating whether they should give him blood thinners because he had brain bleeds. But should they do that? And then they decided, well, yeah, it was fair to try. So it was back and forth. They had restrained him because he got up and walked around, and they didn't want that because of his back injuries. So, they restrained him.

In the end, when it all went through WCB—I'm jumping ahead here a little—they threw his case. He didn't qualify because his injuries weren't what took his life. None of this actually mattered. It was COVID.

Kyle Morgan

So you're saying that you tried to make a claim through the Workers Compensation Board?

Sara Martens

Yeah, they actually— They and MPI [Manitoba Public Insurance] contacted me that I could do that; I didn't even know. So I did with WCB. They went through all the paperwork; they said, "Well, he didn't die from his injuries." But yet, in the beginning, everything had to be about his— He couldn't walk around. He couldn't do anything because of his injuries and his brain bleeds, and all of that. And now, none of that played into effect.

Then came the day where— "He was just very sick," so they said, "He was very, very sick." I asked the question, how long they would keep him on a ventilator? And that nurse at that time said, "You know, seeing you asked, I will put you through to a doctor." So a doctor actually called me, and so then that discussion started. And she too said, "It's not good for him to stay on this for so long."

They were really hoping that I would make a decision by that following— This was, I believe, on a Monday, and they wanted me to make that decision by that weekend. "Anything past that weekend," she said, "you are only hurting him. It would not be good for him."

Kyle Morgan

And I understand it was November 5th, 2021?

Sara Martens

He passed away November the 5th.

Kyle Morgan

And the original accident was October 20th?

Sara Martens

Yeah. We were never allowed— They told us that we could come in— If at time of death or the end of life, we would be able to come in. While that was coming closer, we were not allowed to go in. And we never were allowed to go in. We never saw him. We did Zoom calls after he was fully intubated. Then they completely paralyzed him. So there was nothing. The machines kept him alive. That's all it was. And that's how we saw him.

And you know, I feel angry about some of that stuff. And I feel like, those nurses feel so safe and protected with their PPE protection. Well, I have the same. I have the N95. I have all the same. Why could we not go in there? But they told us, "Oh, no, he's shedding. You can't go in there."

Kyle Morgan

I'm mindful of the time, but I wanted to ask you, how do you think things could have been handled differently?

Sara Martens

I think that, and it's been said many times, I think people should have the freedom to have a vax or not. I feel that they should not— They should take care of you whether you're vaxxed or you're not. I think, just like Martha said about people coming in and touching your loved one and talking to them, I think that would have been a big thing. But I think the protocols were what they were.

[00:20:00]

And you know, not to mention the meanness that people— How mean people become. I had a person in the family call me about six months later, and she just tied into me and said, "That death was so useless. If he would have only been vaxxed, he would never have died." And you know, you're already down. I was recovering from a full knee replacement 30 days prior to his accident, and that surgery wasn't that successful because I had to have it redone about four months ago.

And so, you're dealing with all of that. You're dealing with the unknown. What's going to happen to him? Every phone call was a negative one. You dreaded even picking up the phone. There's times I just, I couldn't even phone. And then I did phone, and it was just such a hard time.

And then you have people who are so mean and rude. And where's the freedom? Where's the freedom for us to do what we want to do? You know, it's so ironic: there's lottery tickets if you're vaxxed. There's money given at the place of work if you get vaxxed. It's just so crazy. And you try to maintain relationship with those kinds of mindsets; that's pretty difficult, and it gets pretty ugly out there. And we have felt that, very much so.

Kyle Morgan

Those are all the questions I had to ask you. I don't know if the commissioners had any questions. I want to thank you very much for your testimony. It's very appreciated.

[00:22:01]

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